



John P. Cahill
Commissioner

MEMORANDUM

TO: Regional DEC Recycling Coordinators
FROM: Thomas Corbett, DSHM, Region 9
SUBJECT: Responding to Questions from Automotive Recycling Yards on collecting, storing, transporting, and recycling of mercury switches removed from end-of-life vehicles
DATE: October 23, 2000

The Department, working under a grant from EPA, is collaborating with the Alliance of Automotive Manufacturers to provide educational materials on the proper recycling of mercury switches removed from end-of-life vehicles at automotive recycling yards. This document will provide you with background materials on the subject. Responses to anticipated questions from the regulated community are also provided in a Q&A format.

The attached document "Getting Mercury Out of Cars" was produced by the Alliance of Automotive Manufacturers is being mailed to four hundred and thirty (430) Automotive Recycling Yards across New York State. Supplemental information, including a list of mercury recycling facilities and contact information for the Regional DEC offices, is also being included with the mailing.

The following questions and answers, on the subject of managing mercury switch waste from automotive recycling yards, are the ones most likely to be encountered:

- Q1. How does my hazardous waste generator status affect the management options for the mercury switches that I collect from junk vehicles in my yard?
- A1. The management options differ, depending on the hazardous waste generator status. Nearly all the automotive recycling yards surveyed in Region 9 were found to be CESQGs.

Conditionally Exempt Small Quantity Generators (CESQG) of hazardous waste:

- Do not have to label the container used for accumulation/storage of the mercury switches
- Can self-transport up to 220 lbs of their own mercury switches to a permitted mercury recycling facility. Per DOT 49 CFR 173.164 paragraph (d), the switches must be put in packages of less than 1 lb net weight to be exempt from DOT shipping requirements. Any number of the < 1 lb packages may be shipped on the same vehicle via highway.
- Can self-transport up to 220 lbs of their own mercury switches to a Household Hazardous Waste (HHW) collection location that also accepts CESQG waste and is permitted to accept mercury containing devices. Per DOT 49 CFR 173.164 paragraph (d), the switches must be put in packages of less than 1 lb net weight to be exempt from DOT shipping requirements. Any number of the < 1 lb packages may be shipped on the same vehicle via highway.

- Do not need to use a hazardous waste manifest when shipping the mercury switches to a recycling facility
- Must use a Part 364 permitted hazardous waste hauler to transport the mercury switches to the recycling facility if not self-transported

Small Quantity Generators (SQG) of hazardous waste:

- Accumulation container requires hazardous waste labeling
- Must use a Part 364 permitted hazardous waste hauler to transport the mercury switches to a recycling facility.
- Are required to use a NYSDEC hazardous waste manifest in shipping the mercury switches to a permitted recycling facility.

Q2. How do I determine my hazardous waste generator status?

A2. Refer to DEC publication “Am I a Small Quantity Hazardous Waste Generator “ or to the DEC web site for specifics. Generally, CESQGs generate no more than 220 lbs/month of hazardous waste and never store more than a total of 2200 lbs. SQGs generate a total of 220-2200 lbs/month of hazardous waste and never store more than 13200 lbs.

Q3. What kind of container can I use to collect the switches and how long can I accumulate the mercury switches that I collect?

A3. A 5 gallon plastic container with lid can securely hold up to 20,000 automotive mercury switches. The average yard generates approximately 500 switches/year, so a 5 gallon accumulation container would provide capacity for more than 20 years of accumulation.

Q4. Are automotive mercury switches considered Universal Waste?

A4. No, automotive mercury switches are not on the NYSDEC or USEPA lists of Universal Waste.

Q5. What regulation requires yard owners to properly manage the automotive mercury switches?

A5. Federal and State Water regulations require automotive recycling yards to have a Storm Water Permit. The Storm Water Permit further requires yard owners to have a Pollution Prevention Plan in which the yard owner provides detail on how releases of hazardous constituents (including mercury) will be prevented. Exposed car bodies and car crushers are known sources which release mercury in yards. Because all sources containing hazardous constituents that are exposed to storm water must have an action to prevent releases, the collection and storage of mercury switches is the means of preventing mercury contamination and storm water releases in yards.